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Dear Partners,

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's U.S. Libraries program began with one goal: ensuring that if you can get to a public library, you can access the Internet to learn, explore opportunities, and enrich your life. More than ten years later, nearly every public library in the nation offers free use of computers and the Internet, and nearly one-third of Americans age 14 or older—approximately 77 million people—are using a public library computer or wireless network to access the Internet. The challenge now is to continue to expand Internet and technology services to meet the growing needs of patrons.

As part of our effort to support libraries in sustaining and improving public computer and Internet access for communities, we have funded studies to learn more about the ways libraries can connect to and maintain high-quality Internet service. Last year, we funded the American Library Association Office of Internet Technology Policy's (OITP) to develop the report, ["Making Connections: Lessons from Five Shared Library Networks."](#) That publication provides practical information and case studies that outline various public library connectivity options.

Today, we are pleased to share with you the findings of a new study we commissioned to explore the potential benefits of research and education Internet networks for public libraries. The attached findings developed by the telecommunications strategy firm CSMG, are intended to illuminate the unique attributes of research and education networks, and to consider how libraries can utilize those assets to support improved connectivity and new applications for patrons.

The foundation commissioned this study in response to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's unprecedented investments in state and regional fiber networks through the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). The expansion of broadband through research and education networks creates new opportunities for public libraries to connect to the Internet and access a variety of "value-added" services.

Our thanks to many of our colleagues in the public library and R&E network fields who provided extensive consultation to inform this report. We hope this resource will be valuable to public libraries in assessing their options to secure broadband access and continuing to provide high quality technology access to the communities and patrons they serve.

Best,

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Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation